



As we traverse the gallery, the extent of Freeman's inspiration reveals itself in an array of objects. Vials, flasks, brooches and other historical domestic objects are elevated and reimagined in situ alongside Honor's new works. The gallery becomes a memorial to the symbolic reminders of mortality inserted into common objects by Western and Eastern societies. Freeman calls them 'small monuments', sensing the grandness of their meaning but remaining aware of the delicacy and intimacy of each memento's scale.

This sense of weight, depth and the measure of grief is explored in Freeman's *All the tears I cried*. Again seen through the lens of the domestic, Freeman's arrangement of buckets, conscientiously moulded and cast, and then tempered with an iridescent finish of mother-of-pearl, takes on substantial and solemn form in the gallery. Musing on the theories of collecting tears and representing the sixty-one-and-a-half litres every person will potentially cry across their lifetime, these buckets represent Freeman's own personal grief and the manner in which it is manifested in public and private spaces. These buckets are dramatically poised at their tipping point, glistening against the light and shadow of the space, and ready to overflow.

Informed by the intricacy of Victorian mourning jewelry, Freeman's expansive work *Shape of tears* resonates not only as an ode to the common

handkerchief but is underscored by a heartfelt attempt to preserve the aura of the lost. This work travels beyond the gallery walls and is the cumulation of months of collating donated handkerchiefs from friends, colleagues and strangers, some accompanied by tales of their origin and perhaps enabling an opportunity to communicate their personal stories of loss. Freeman's studio benches overflowed with her father's hankies and those belonging to other people, stacked one above another, precariously towering like a monument to sorrow. Through the casting process, each handkerchief must be destroyed to allow its immortalisation in porcelain to occur, the process itself a bittersweet reminder of our fragility and the nature of life.

Within the gallery the work inspires a tactile and sensory response. We can imagine the softness of the cotton, the familiar palette of colours recalling a different generation, and perhaps with the scent of laundry powder or camphor (moth balls) exuding from these handkerchiefs. Each holds an independent existence, with the folds, wrinkles and embroidery almost identifying the 'type' of person who once held it closely. What Freeman has ambitiously produced is a community of stories, all engineered to impart not only the experience of loss but also the commonalities of the everyday we share as a society.



Shifting the boundaries between the domains that are considered to be public and private while intersecting with the histories that have shaped our culture, Freeman creates a palpable sense of intimacy within the gallery. *Ghost objects* is thought-provoking in both its concept and production. Essentially, Freeman's newest works explore the meditative state between the conscious and unconscious. The display is replete with paradoxical considerations – from the musings of the everyday and the shifting states of materiality, to the overarching sense of the surreal. Freeman habitually uses these techniques to question the hierarchy in which we see objects; however, for this presentation something much more personal is offered. *Ghost objects* is an attempt to capture the transitory nature of time and the process of grief and solace, at the same time seeking to participate in a universal language of mourning by means of objects. Ultimately, the viewer is situated at the conceptual gateway between these worlds and a humbling resting place for this particular artistic journey.

Rayleen Forester, 2019

Honor Freeman, born Glenelg, South Australia 1978, lives and works in Adelaide
far left: *All the tears I cried*, 2019, Adelaide, slipcast porcelain, dimensions variable
above: *Things I know you've touched*, 2019, Adelaide, slipcast porcelain, gold lustre, dimensions variable
cover detail: *Shape of tears*, 2019, Adelaide, porcelain, dimensions variable
photos: Grant Hancock

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Honor Freeman, 2019

For further information visit: www.honorfreeman.com
Honor Freeman is represented by Sabbia Gallery, Sydney, www.sabbiagallery.com

Honor Freeman: Ghost objects

27 July – 29 September 2019, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

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Project team: Leigh Robb, Emma Fey, Debbie Pryor

Project Partners



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The wound is the place where light enters you

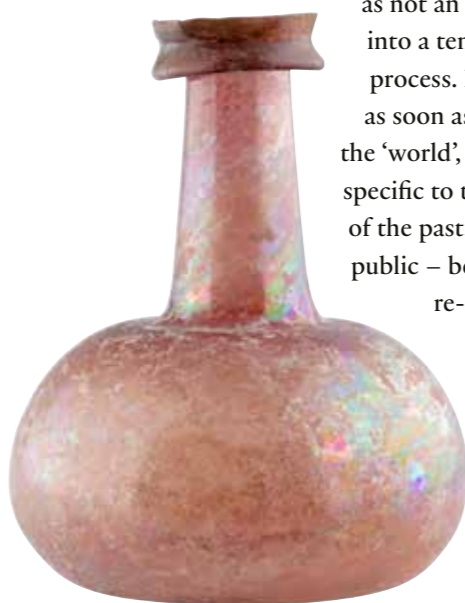
Rumi

For the 2019 Guildhouse Collections Project at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Honor Freeman brings a number of important artistic and cultural theories clearly into focus in her exhibition, *Ghost objects*. Through the lens of the domestic – the undervalued, discarded and everyday – Honor has encouraged a poignant reading of our collective understanding of loss and grief. Impelled by a mission to make sense of a loss of her own, this exhibition conducts a dialogue with a number of historical collection pieces, these being recalibrated to speak to the contemporary theory of self-care, expression and vulnerability. Ceramics and pottery are essentially an art form of time – a vessel and an archive. This presentation profoundly traverses the personal spaces of Honor’s thinking about the objects that tell stories and make sense of this world and the one beyond.

Ghost objects is the culmination of a series of personal and professional aspirations in Honor Freeman’s practice. Guided by the Gallery’s contemporary art curator, Leigh Robb, Freeman has created a suite of pivotal new works inspired by objects in AGSA’s collection while revisiting already-held theories from her oeuvre.

Although an investigation into several of the individual and shared ideologies that have become the foundation of Honor Freeman’s practice, *Ghost objects* differs in that, here, the audience is welcomed into the process: Freeman’s research and influences are laid bare in the gallery. When meandering through the space, the viewer is introduced to the research and curatorial development of Freeman’s most ambitious work to date.

An artist’s participation in a research-based project with the outcome of an institutional display prompts the question of the approach to be taken; that is, to identify the strategies and methods they are most comfortable with. The artist is charged with the worthwhile task of discerning the meaning, knowledge and reason inherent in a public collection and communicating this through their practice.



‘Reason’ has its origins in our need to ponder questions to which we know there are no answers and for which no measurable or accountable knowledge is produced, such as questions of immortality, grief, the gods and freedom. Reason almost transcends the limitations of knowledge and, specifically, the criteria of certainty and proof. Philosopher Hannah Arendt states in *The life of the mind* (1977), ‘the need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning’, and that ‘meaning and truth are not the same’.

It is within this blurred state, where knowledge and reason intersect with uncertainty and the unknown, that we see the work of an artist as not an end point or product of their thinking. We enter into a temporary state: a glimpse into a never-ending thought process. In relation to collections and institutional displays, as soon as the artist has allowed the art object to be part of the ‘world’, the artist has freed themselves from it. Their activity specific to the work has ended and the work becomes a subject of the past. It is at this point that the viewer or beholder – the public – becomes involved in the work. The chain of thought is re-established, embodied within the piece of art itself.

After the death of her father in 2017 and in the process of evaluating, storing and parting ways with the objects he owned, Honor was given a stack of handkerchiefs and her father’s last used bar of soap by her mother. This emotional act motivated a line of research into the complex terrain of grief and the rituals associated with mourning by means of an encounter with the Gallery’s collection of lachrymatories (tear flasks), *chawan* (Japanese tea bowls) and other funerary objects from around the world. Much of Honor’s research was marred by discredited theories, although she was still affected by the poetry and long-embedded belief system associated with an object’s power.

above: Italy, mid-late Roman Imperial, *Roman glass flask*, 2nd century AD, Eastern Mediterranean?, glass, 13.5 x 3.5 cm; Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 1974. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide photo: Saul Steed



An inevitable aspect of human existence is death. Responses to death have prompted many unique practices, these varying around the world, from culture to culture. Differing levels of social standing and economic status in societies may determine significantly different approaches to death. Death can inspire a multitude of responses – stages of grief, a sombre or celebratory occasion, or perhaps an onerous responsibility, requiring effort and money.

Japan is a country where there are strict rules and processes associated with death and mourning. During the Kofun and Asuka periods (third to eighth centuries CE), *Haniwa* terracotta cylinders, figures, animals and houses were placed on top of large tombs or *tumuli* to offer protection from evil spirits in the afterlife – although it has also been suggested that the *Haniwa* figures were there to protect the living from the spirits of those who had died. Circling the tomb, these objects offer both decorative and spiritual value and provide an example of a Japanese custom whereby the present and afterlife cross paths through craftsmanship and artistry. Japan’s spiritual and cultural fabric is still well informed by its objects of the past and a recognition of the transience of human existence. The *Haniwa* figures which were once displayed outdoors on great funerary mounds acted as potent reminders of the importance of placating and protecting one’s ancestors in the afterlife. Buddhist sculptures in and around temple precincts even in the bustle of cities are physically dressed for the seasons – for example scarves, beanies and blankets can be found dressed on *Bodhisattvas* for the frigid winter. In Japan, the dead are very much a part of the living.

Fundamental to Freeman’s practice is heightening the sense of value in the mundane. She has transformed Tupperware, sponges, towels and power points into potent and nuanced objects. They are charged with a history and narrative of their own, each different in the eye of the viewer. It is no surprise that she was drawn to the *kintsugi chawan* tea bowls, an everyday staple in Japanese households.

Kintsugi in Japanese culture is the art of repairing – with golden lacquer – broken pottery, renewing and instilling beauty into its flaws and breaks. As opposed to the pottery being discarded, *kintsugi* adds value and a historical narrative to the object. The imperfection becomes the object’s strength and a sign of resilience. This empowering metaphor encourages a transcendental experience, with objects communicating a new value in beauty, loss and transformation.

Freeman’s work *Things I know you’ve touched* is an important and personal musing on loss and its accumulative measure through the physical manifestation of a bar of soap – domestic and regularly discarded – mended by *kintsugi* and installed as a kinetic work of relational pieces. Here, we can witness the process of production and craftsmanship in every crack and surface, these having been exquisitely ‘corrected’ by the artist. *Kintsugi* inspires a change in attitude towards life: the philosophy dictates that all hardships shape us as people. The struggles we face – loss, heartbreak, and disappointment – are an integral part of our histories, our identities and our storytelling. Rather than concealing the scars that these adversities inflict, *kintsugi* encourages us to celebrate them and the ways in which they serve to define us. Nothing is ever truly broken.

The development of this exhibition has not occurred without many physical, material and emotional costs. Honor’s choice of porcelain comes with a level of risk during the production process. Time and temperature play a pivotal role in the preparation of moulds, slip casting, firing and treating. The artifacts rely on (in this case) the ‘Kiln Gods’ for their immortality – or their destruction. The process itself conceptually speaks to the human condition and the very context from which this exhibition is derived. As a fragile species, we undergo a series of transformations across a lifetime – rebuilding and repairing ourselves along the way, strengthening our resilience as our wounds heal.

above: Japan, *Tea bowl (chawan) named ‘Morning light’ (akebono)*, Shigaraki ware, 17th century, Shigaraki, Shiga prefecture, earthenware, ash glaze, gold and silver mends, 8.0 x 13.0 cm (diam.); M.J.M. Carter AO Collection through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2019 photo: Saul Steed

left: Honor Freeman, born Glenelg, South Australia 1978, lives and works in Adelaide, *Shape of tears*, 2019, Adelaide, porcelain, dimensions variable; photo: Grant Hancock

